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DE RUEHFR #5837/01 2421548  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0867  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE  
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 005837

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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EUN](#) [UNSC](#) [TU](#) [PTER](#) [NATO](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: FM DOUSTE-BLAZY'S SPEECH TO FRENCH AMBASSADORS

REF: PARIS 5811

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Foreign Minister Douste-Blazy addressed the annual conference of French ambassadors on August 29, echoing many of the same themes outlined by President Chirac in his address to the ambassadors the day before (reftel). Douste-Blazy stressed the exceptional role France still plays in international affairs during a crucial time. Like Chirac, Douste-Blazy warned of "conflicts of civilizations" and stressed the importance of political processes and multilateral diplomacy over unilateral military action. The lesson to be gleaned from recent crises in the Middle East is that force alone has its limits (the US in Iraq and Israel in the Palestinian territories and Lebanon were cited), and he encouraged collective action by the international community to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the region's other pressing problems. He termed Iran's latest response to the international community on its nuclear program as "ambiguous," as it left aside the essential question of enrichment. However, he noted Iran's openness to dialogue and discussion.

¶2. (SBU) Douste-Blazy told the ambassadors that European Union (EU) enlargement should be tied to its capacity to absorb new members, and that institutional reforms should occur within the framework of existing treaties. He stressed the importance of "solidarity" as a guiding principle of French foreign policy, pointing to UNITAID (French initiative to use a tax on airline tickets to finance health and related assistance efforts in the developing world) as evidence of France's commitment to addressing the barriers between "North and South." Douste-Blazy supported cultural diversity and democracy, while noting that the West cannot impose democracy on others. Finally, he called for a more operational French diplomacy and repositioning to take account of new global demographics. END SUMMARY.

FRANCE'S EXCEPTIONAL ROLE IN GLOBAL POLITICS

¶3. (SBU) In his August 29 address to the annual Ambassadors' Conference in Paris, characterized as his "personal reflections," Foreign Minister Douste-Blazy stressed the important role France continues to play on the global stage, saying France's point of view is "solicited, waited for, and observed," and that among France's partners, France's positions "often generate admiration, sometimes irritation, but rarely indifference." Citing France's permanent seat on the UN Security Council, its participation in the G-8, its role in the EU and NATO, its nuclear capacity, and France's cultural and technological assets, Douste-Blazy asserted that France would remain a major global actor. He cited as accomplishments France's "showing the way in the Middle

East," UNITAID, the ongoing debate over EU enlargement, and UNESCO's adoption of the convention on cultural diversity in the face of U.S. opposition.

#### MIDDLE EAST CRISES OFFER LESSONS

14. (SBU) Douste-Blazy pointed to the current crises in the Middle East as providing a prominent illustration of the importance of French action over the past year. Stating that the Middle East crises provide critical lessons to the world community, he said the "first lesson" is that military force alone has its limits. He cited "American intervention" in Iraq, the situation in the Palestinian territories, and the recent crisis in Lebanon as examples of the limitations of military operations as the sole answer to the problems of the region.

15. (SBU) Moreover, the Foreign Minister stressed the importance of "collective action and the cohesion of the international community" in addressing the problems of the Middle East, stating that no one state can act alone to provide international security. Pointing to the importance of the UN Security Council in addressing these crises (and stating that "the UN is us"), Douste-Blazy explained that France waited to clarify rules of engagement and the chain of command for the UNIFIL force in Lebanon to implement Security Council Resolution 1701 in order to improve the effectiveness of the peacekeeping operations in Lebanon. Without referring specifically to enlargement of the UN Security Council or using Chirac's phrases of "multipolarity" and "grand poles," Douste-Blazy added that France emphasized the importance of working closely with the U.S., Russia, China, and "new regional powers like South Africa, Brazil, and India."

#### ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT CAUSES FOREIGN MINISTER CONCERN

16. (SBU) Douste-Blazy declared his "profound concern" over

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the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Foreign Minister opined that the "positive dynamic" created in Israel during the recent elections is now in question, and that on the Palestinian side Hamas has not accepted European conditions for dialogue (i.e., recognition of Israel, renunciation of violence, and acceptance of past agreements such as Oslo). Stressing France's support for Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and the need for multilateral action, Douste-Blazy called for a return to the Quartet to find a way forward in the conflict. He also pointed to the "document of national entente" signed by the various parties in the Palestinian Legislature on June 27 as a positive step in the development of responsible Palestinian governance.

#### IRANIAN RESPONSE AMBIGUOUS

17. (SBU) Addressing international concerns over Iran's nuclear energy program, Douste-Blazy characterized the latest Iranian response to the international community as "ambiguous," stating that it leaves aside the essential question of whether Iran is pursuing the enrichment of uranium. An Iranian gesture here was essential for reestablishing confidence among the negotiating parties. However, Douste-Blazy noted the openness of the Iranian regime to dialogue and discussion. "Without renouncing our demands about suspension, France is also ready to renew the dialogue. But it must be one that is lucid, concrete, and responsible," he declared. "We want this dialogue rapidly, with the aim of seriously discussing and finding solutions to the nuclear problem."

#### DON'T NEGLECT CRISES IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

18. (SBU) The Foreign Minister urged the ambassadors not to forget crises in other parts of the world despite the attention required to address issues in the Middle East, and named crises in Darfur, Somalia, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, South

Asia, the Korean Peninsula, and Haiti as examples. He declared that "solidarity" is among the principles guiding French action in the world, and noted the importance of French financing and development programs like UNITAID, a French-initiated effort to finance health and related assistance efforts in the developing world through a tax on airline tickets. He stated that France's development programs are meant to address "the gap between North and South in matters of health, education, and quality of life."

#### EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: LINK ENLARGEMENT TO ABSORPTION CAPACITY

¶9. (SBU) Noting France's goals for European integration, Douste-Blazy echoed President Chirac's call to ensure that EU enlargement is linked to its capacity to absorb new members. Institutionally, he encouraged EU member states to work for now within the framework of existing treaties. Noting the importance of Franco-German relations, the Foreign Minister stated that he expects the Germans to begin important initiatives in this regard during the period of the German presidency in 2007, and that they could reach fruition during the French presidency in 2008. He also stressed the need for a Europe of concrete projects, such as creating a truly European energy policy, in order to ensure that the EU can live up to its responsibilities at home and abroad.

#### PROMOTE CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND DEMOCRACY, BUT RESPECT SOVEREIGNTY

¶10. (SBU) Douste-Blazy spoke to the need to promote cultural diversity and respect in an era of globalization. Addressing the promotion of democracy around the world, he opined that this is a difficult subject full of contradictions. The West should not impose democracy on states, and should respect sovereignty while avoiding interference in internal affairs. He added that countries need time to develop the necessary foundations for democratic governance, including the rule of law, a free press, and an independent judiciary.

#### GLOBAL REPOSITIONING IN THE CARDS FOR FRENCH DIPLOMATS

¶11. (SBU) Noting that French diplomacy needs to become more "operational" in the face of changing global demographics, Douste-Blazy also addressed the need for global repositioning of French diplomats. To that end, the Foreign Minister announced that 1,500 Ministry of Foreign Affairs employees would be repositioned to emerging countries, in particular China and India, between 2006 and 2008.

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